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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



# SHE IS A LADY WITH BREEDING

by Lala Heine-Koehn

The grey roof matches the fifty two  
room manor, blends into the forever  
grey skies.

It is the home of the widow,  
whose husband is still alive.  
Her weeds are those of a gracious  
lady; white muslin, stitched with  
the finest of thread, cutwork  
medallions, ribbons and lace.

The lady is sad.

Her garments are turning an ivory  
colour, her parlour to match.  
Each seven days she gathers  
her hem, her favourite silk  
cushions, her books, and moves  
into another one of the fifty  
two rooms. In each one hangs  
a portrait of her husband not  
yet dead. She inclines her head  
lightly, greets him with a shadow  
of her smile and proceeds to  
arrange the room according  
to her status:

a sad lady with taste.

Camellias in fluted enameled urns  
on the console under her husband's  
gold-framed image; the air  
perfumed with the finest of incense  
from the Far East. A peacock fan,  
swaying gently, distributing its  
fragrance.

The lady's arms are alabaster.

Each night she dreams the same  
fabulous dream: a man,  
pale-skin, raven-black hair  
implores her: "Gracious Lady  
of my blood, leave this house  
and come with me. I will build  
another one for you, with fifty  
two and one more rooms. We will  
live in the last one, filled  
with sunlight from morning till  
night, and a singing bird for each  
one of your fingers.  
O lady of my blood, my passion  
for you is unequaled; exceeding anyone's  
dead or alive. Leave this house,  
come with me or I will perish."

The lady's heart is bleeding,

but she cannot. She is a widow,  
her days are divided and numbered  
by the fifty two rooms; in each one  
of them a portrait of her  
husband not yet dead.

What would become of the fluted  
enamel urns, who would fill them  
with camellias?

Who would burn the incense  
from the Far East?

Each morning the lady cries,  
hiding her tears,

she is a lady with breeding.

She closes the window, lights up  
the candles, cups her hands around

the flames. Shadow play upon  
flicker, focus on her bent-over  
body. A pain rises between her  
singed shoulder blades,

the lady is hurting.

*O my darling doe, my playmate  
my joy, how I miss thee* she sighs,  
wiping stealthily a tear with  
the hem of her dress. Quickly  
she smoothes it into place, hiding  
her ankles in the five-elbow-lengths  
muslin. No one must see them,  
not even she. When undressing for  
the night, she closes her eyes,

the lady is modest.

Every forty nine days he feels  
restless. Changing the fifty two  
rooms in the manor at the end  
of each week, she is left with  
three days and no place to go.  
Not long ago, during that time,  
she used to walk in the garden with her pet  
beside her, it was  
easier then. But now, her pet is  
gone, buried by the lilypond,  
a grey rock for his pillow.  
*O my darling doe, my playmate  
my joy,*

the lady is lonely.

the walls, her husband's eyes  
Before the night comes, the lady  
falls asleep, her head, cradled  
in her arm rests upon the window  
sill. The night blows out  
the candles, wraps her in his  
cloak, tucking the ends around her  
feet. Beside her lies a small silver  
scissors in the shape of a crane  
stretching its neck toward her.  
It slides between her fingers.

the lady is sleep-walking,

from one room into another.  
She greets her husband hanging  
on the wall, raises her hand,  
pushes the crane's beak into  
his eyes; bowing politely,  
she leaves. Goes to the next,  
and the next room; the lady's  
hem flutters around her ankles,  
sweeping the floor. Around her  
neck, a strand of precious pearls,  
shaped like teardrops, swings  
gracefully, becomes longer, longer.

Dawn comes, the lady is still  
asleep; her head cradled in  
her arms upon the windowsill,  
a smile on her face,

the lady is dreaming  
she is a widow.